

Project Description

In a Los Angeles neighborhood devoid of parks and gardens, the landscape architect collaborated with a city-wide school district to develop a community garden adjacent to a community wellness center on the grounds of a high school. Key components of the garden include an orchard, raised planters for the students as well as for community members, a low-water use lawn, an area paved in decomposed granite for events and a shaded park planted with California natives and medicinal plants.

The clinic and garden occupy a 1.5-acre site in south central Los Angeles, surrounded on 2 sides by city streets and the high school play field to the north. The garden is used by the students, the community and the clinic for teaching moments, gardening, and healing. The learning gardens have been integrated into the high school curriculum to teach students healthier eating habits, how to grow their own food and to develop interests in food cultivation as a career. Farmer's Markets and community support events will be held in the large event space between the parking lot and the outdoor classroom. Garden plots are offered to families who live in the community to cultivate crops for food.

The gardens are flanked by native California plants that attract bees for use in pollinating the crops on site. The existing mature Empress Tree grove and Sycamore trees were preserved to create much needed shade in this arid part of Los Angeles. A demonstration lawn that shows how native grasses can be used as an alternative to turf lawns has been established.

Strategies have been developed to control storm water so it doesn't flow into municipal catchments. One strategy is grading the parking areas into bio-swales that collect and filter the water before it slowly seeps into the groundwater. Another strategy is the use of permeable paving for parking stalls and pedestrian paths that allow the storm water to directly percolate into the ground. The site has been graded so that storm water is directed into planting areas to irrigate the plants.

The gardens have become a refuge for those who live in the community. Children will learn where their food comes from, about the food industry, and about the value of medicinal plants, including Aloe Vera, St. John's Wort, and Echinacea that are part of the medicinal garden next to the health clinic. The students have become stewards of the garden through their planting, watering, and composting. They will learn the responsibilities and joy that come with growing one's own food.

From the School District website:

The new Wellness Center and Community Garden will provide much needed healthcare services, food access, and green and safe spaces for the local community. On an annual basis, it is anticipated that 400 students will use the site and approximately 2,000 community members. This partnership has resulted in an innovative school/community-based health promotion and disease prevention project to improve the health outcomes of the students and residents living in the South Los Angeles community.